

Sunday, 11 March, 2007

Jim Jacek, Fern Wager, Robin Rombs (R)

This was the UVic Caving Club's 1st effort to locate a cave for Adrian's proposed Caves of Victoria project: re-visiting the remaining caves of the area as culled from the records of VICEG (and BCSF?) Nine of 21 identified have been lost to development, a couple others face imminent destruction à la SPAET Cave by the Bear Mtn development on what is actually Skirt Mtn, and some have not been visited so long as to be "lost" and need to be re-located.

Our efforts this day were unsuccessful as we searched behind the Spencer Rd School, on the wrong side of Spencer Pond, based on old information.

Thursday, 15 March

Rick Coles, Dale Froese, Robin Rombs (R)

Rick met up with myself and Dale Froese, to show us the entrance. He led us to the area the old way, and located the entrance after a bit of tramping about. Lots of rubbish around. A second entrance has opened up/been excavated adjacent to the first since the last survey (1977, by P. Hoen & P. Shaw) and there are other sinkholes in the area. The old gate on the first entrance, with "PROVINCIAL CAPITAL COMMISSION" welded onto it, is still there but the lid is disconnected from the frame. Rick's dowsing indicated subsurface water running at several places across the hillside. It looks like some heavy equipment has been in the area, with some excavation and plenty of survey stakes indicating a road centerline passing within 10 m of the entrances. Dale told us about a wasp's nest reportedly at the entrance in the summer, according to a geo-caching website. We followed a different trail out which led us directly to the parked cars.

Sunday, 25 March

Ben Brill, Fern Wager, Matt Stockman, Robin Rombs (R) and Ginger (the dog) [all photos by Ben]

We took plenty of garbage bags with us and we filled 4 of them with all sorts of rubbish. Refuse from in and around the entrance included a soggy sleeping bag, a battered nonstick frying pan and other evidence of camping, two 5-gallon tin buckets, a 3 lb lead ball, plus the usual adolescent drinking-spot detritus: more than one large coffee can full of broken glass, numerous Bic lighters, lots of tea candles, and heaps of junk food wrappers. There is still more broken glass in the cave, most of it in tiny pieces mixed with the silt and rocks on the floor, but we got a lot of it. There is a fair bit of the accompanying graffiti (arrows and the like) on the cave walls in day-glo orange spray paint, as well as on the tree above the entrance.

The cave is basically like what is shown in the 1977 survey, with the exception of the 2nd entrance. Two passages lead from the entrance chamber to the next open room: on the old survey, one of these is shown (clogged?) with breakdown. At our visit, this was the way on. The one shown as clear on the survey, the one nearer the original entrance, was choked with rock and wood, evidently backfilled at some point. We cleared this out, mainly through Ben's efforts. We also pulled out some of the wood and rocks from below the 'new' entrance, also seemingly the results of backfilling.

Where the 2nd chamber narrows to a smaller opening into the way onward, roughly 11m into the cave, there is standing water. It's only about knee-deep, but the ceiling is such that you have to almost crawl into it before you can get into a stooping/crouching position. After the trash removal and checking out a nearby sinkhole which did not yield immediate results, Fern and I went ahead anyways. Some garbage remains in the wet section of the cave, from which we did not attempt any removal this time out. Another 10 or so metres later, the floor rose above the water, and that is where a geo-cache called "Molasses in January" resides, placed there on 25 Feb, 2006. The geocaching website logs a visit as recently as 25 January, 2007. The floor again descends below water, but not as deep nor for as long. There is a sort of an oxbow to the main passage in clean limestone on the left before the passage goes up to a choke at the end of the cave. The survey states a length of 39.5 m and a depth of 1.9 m.

During the clean-up we were visited first by a couple of local environmental activists who were scoping out trees for a tree-sit to protest the proposed highway interchange/overpass (misleadingly called the Spencer Rd interchange- it would incorporate Leigh Rd, nearest the cave. Houses along the road have already been expropriated by Langford.) They have reportedly got their platform in place since then. A couple of interested residents also walked by and asked us what we were about. They said they had heard things were happening in the woods, to do with both the interchange and the cave, and they wanted to have a look. They were supportive of our clean-up efforts and asked to be emailed copies of the photos we took. Later still, when we left the woods and went back to our vehicles, more residents of Leigh Rd spoke to us about the cave. One was a man who said he lives in the house he grew up in, pointed to it, and said that now the municipality owns it. He told us how he used to go in the cave when he was a kid, and now he has kids of his own. Interestingly, he also said that he works at the Bear Mtn development, and asked what that cave had been like before it was destroyed.